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ABSTRACT

Through technology, students with disabilities are identifying new options for participation, exerting more control, making more choices, and interacting more effectively. Inclusion, as a policy and as a practice, is reducing the physical and social isolation encountered by individuals and families, broadening expectations, reducing limits, and expanding choices. Technology and inclusion go hand in hand. Without technology supports and accommodations, many students cannot take full advantage of education. Without the opportunities for interaction found in inclusive settings, students cannot truly demonstrate their abilities. The following areas should be analyzed to determine whether technology support has the potential to facilitate the child's participation: (1) transportation to and from school and related events; (2) physical access; (3) classroom/library equipment and modifications; (4) shop/vocational education; (5) lunchroom; (6) playground/gym; (7) evaluation/assessment; (8) curriculum; (9) Individualized Education Program or Individualized Family Service Plan; (10) training; and (11) planning and policy. Several questions to consider in analyzing each area are listed. (JDD)

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HAND in HAND

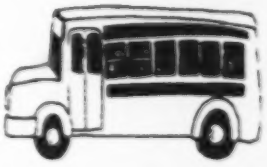
Changes are being made in educational settings that are significantly impacting life options available to students once they leave school. Technology information, devices, and services are more available to students. Through technology, students are identifying new options for participation, exerting more control, making more choices, and interacting more effectively.

Inclusion, as a policy and as a practice, is reducing the physical and social isolation encountered by individuals and families, broadening expectations, reducing limits, and expanding choices. As systems discontinue practices of isolation and segregation, children are freed to participate in learning and growth opportunities.

Technology and inclusion go hand-in-hand, however. Without technology supports and accommodations, many students cannot take full advantage of education. Without the opportunities for interaction found in inclusive settings, students cannot truly demonstrate their abilities.

Take a second look at your child's education options. How could technology support your child and facilitate his/her participation? Some of the questions outlined below will provide a starting point for looking at your child's program in terms of supports for inclusion.

Transportation To and From School and Related Events



- Can your child ride the bus that goes by your home?
- Is there a lift-equipped bus to pick up your child?
- Would technology supports such as mobile phones or CB radio connections between the bus and your home be helpful in accessing transportation?
- Are there wheelchair tie-downs and seatbelt restraints on the bus?
- Does the bus have appropriate temperature controls for heat/air conditioning if your child needs this?
- Are general transfer devices available to assist with movement between wheelchairs, safety seats and bus seats?
- Do bus drivers and aides receive training as appropriate to your child for first aid, seizures, use of lifts and chairs, behavior control, lifting and transfer and communication?
- Does your child have a way to communicate with the other children, the bus driver, and the aide while s/he is on the bus?

"HAND in HAND", THE ACCESS GROUP, 1994

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Physical Access

- Are there curbcuts, ramps, and non-skid sidewalk or hallway surfaces where needed? Have doorknobs been replaced with handles or levers where needed and are there electric door openers if needed?
- Does the building have fire and emergency plans that take your child's needs into account? Are the signals for fire alarms, class changes and other systems reliable for children with sensory, motor, and cognitive disabilities?
- Are bathroom facilities, water fountains, and other such areas accessible?
- Does the "front office" have a TTY, large button touch-tone phone, amplifier for those who have hearing impairments, and a speaker phone?

Classroom/Library Equipment and Modifications

- Are there loop systems or other amplification systems?
- Are there sound baffles where needed?
- Are the temperature controls supportive of your child's needs?
- Do light switches need to be exchanged for motion sensors or alternatives? Does the intensity level of lighting need to be adjusted?
- Are audiovisual supports such as TV and films close-captioned?
- Is there access to an environmental control unit within the classroom?
- Are there modifications available for writing such as pencil grippers, templates, typewriters, computers, note takers, or tape recorders?
- Are seating and positioning equipment and transfer devices available? If possible, is a child encouraged to use a wheelchair for mobility, and is the child encouraged to transfer to a regular desk or adapted seating if possible?
- Does the child's desktop or work surface tilt, turn, or have adjustable height if needed? For young children, is there a way to sit on the floor with others during storytime and other activities? For older students, is there appropriate seating for assemblies and activities in the gym?
- Are lap trays, grippers for table tops, steps, or stools available?
- Is a projection screen used instead of a chalkboard if this would be helpful?
- Is large print available for textbooks, handouts, and homework materials?
- Are Brailled materials available?
- Does the classroom or library have page turners, book holders, computerized reading materials, sliding bookshelves, text enlargers?
- Are large print display and/or voice output calculators available?
- Are mouthsticks, signal systems, or magnifiers available?

Shop/Vocational Education

- Are adapted tools available?
- Are appliances, computers, and other devices adapted as needed, and are work stations tailored to accommodate maximum function?

Lunchroom

- Is the lunchroom set up so that children can easily maneuver through the line, pick up food, and transport it to a seat?
- Are built up or adapted utensils, straws, drink holders, plates, surface grippers, or other feeding utensils available?
- Is the lunch period or snack time long enough to allow children with disabilities to complete activities with their class?
- Is assistance available when needed?
- Have lunchroom personnel had access to inservice training so that they can support your child's needs?

Playground/Gym

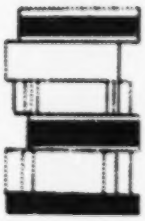
- Are playgrounds, toys, physical education equipment and games adapted as needed?
- Can all children play together as they choose? Do the play areas facilitate or inhibit interaction?
- Are walkways to and from the exercise area wide enough, without barriers, and with non-slip surfaces?

Evaluation/Assessment

- Is there a formal process for evaluating technology needs, including augmentative/alternative communication needs?
- Are communication and other technology devices available through the school system and/or community resources for use during evaluation periods, and for short and long-term loan, while evaluating the child's needs?
- Are recommendations for devices made based on knowledge of a wide range of products and familiarity with the child's needs?

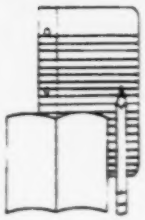
Make sure that device recommendations are not limited by local vendor resources, professional familiarity with a limited number of products, or cost factors.

Curriculum



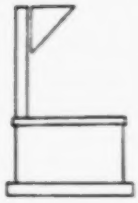
- Are devices used and integrated throughout the curriculum, or does technology use occur only during "speech time" or in the "computer lab?"
- Are related services supportive of the student's needs throughout the curriculum? For example, are communication interactions structured into everything from storytime for preschoolers, to oral reports for older students?

IEP/IFSP or Other Written Plan



- Is there documentation of technology-related evaluation?
- Is there a need to designate a specific person as a technology coordinator to coordinate acquisition of resources, assessment, and services, and so that the teacher and other professionals will have a designated contact person for technology-related support?
- Should opportunities be created for other parents whose children have been successful using technology in inclusive settings to participate as advocates in the IEP meeting?
- Are needs for devices, services, and training documented in the IEP, regardless of funds or availability?
- If consultation is a chosen model of service delivery, does this signify reduced service and support, or is the time allotment realistic to meet the teacher's need for consultation and support?

Training



- Have both the parents and the professionals working with the child participated in the annual CSPD (Comprehensive System of Personnel Development) needs assessment process and documented the need for both parent and professional training related to technology devices and services?
- If training needs are identified through the CSPD process, what is being done to address these needs? Are the training needs addressed related both to individual children and to system-wide needs?
- Are technology-related training and inservices open to parents as well as teachers, and are parents and professionals trained together as part of a team? Parents are considered a part of the multi-disciplinary IEP/IFSP team. In order to function as equal partners, families need equal access to training resources.
- Are teachers encouraged to keep up-to-date with technology by having training, newsletters, peer support opportunities, and other resources available to them?

Planning and Policy

- Do the local and state school systems document technology-related needs during Child Find and Child Serve activities, and is long-term planning conducted on an individual and system-wide basis to meet the needs identified?
- Do the state and/or local school systems have a written policy on access to assistive technology devices and services?

- Does the local education agency have a written policy or documented practice on the use of technology devices (such as communication devices) during evenings, weekends and summer months, out side of the school building?
- Have the school board, special education advisory council, and school and building administration received training related to assistive technology needs and services? Do they have opinions or policies on the topic?
- Are technology needs and services planned and implemented at the state level through interagency collaboration efforts?
- Are both systems and individuals aware of resources available through the Tech Act programs, and do they have an opportunity to take advantage of these?
- Do parents and individuals with technology needs serve on all planning committees and are they involved in the monitoring of services?

Once you have answered these questions while you think about your child's needs, you will know where to start to make changes Technology is the key. You have to open the door.

HAND in HAND is created by THE ACCESS GROUP to provide information about assistive technology to the families of Vietnam veterans who have children with disabilities. THE ACCESS GROUP is jointly funded by the Agent Orange Class Assistance Program and United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc. If you are a family member or a professional working with families of Vietnam veterans, THE ACCESS GROUP can serve as a resource to you in your efforts to obtain assistive technology. This publication is also available on audiotape. For more information call:
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